

**National Education Association  
Interview with John Dunlop  
Conducted on March 2, 2017 by Vakil Smallen**

**VS:** Today is March 2nd, 2017. This is Vakil Smallen. I'm sitting down with John Dunlop to discuss his time working at the NEA and a little of the time before that, his time basically working with education associations. I guess we can start off by saying is there anything that you would like to start with? Otherwise, I've got my questions here and I can sort of start with them.

**JD:** Start with your questions.

**VS:** To begin with, what made you decide to start working with the Birmingham Education Association? So, you were a teacher in the school district at the time, and what was it that got you in '66 to start working with it?

**JD:** Primarily a relationship with Walt Rogowski, who was a fellow teacher; and we had done our student teaching together and he was vice president of the Birmingham Education Association, and he worked in the same school as Don Cameron who was the president of the BEA at the time. Because I was going to law school and because I was a friend of Walt's, he asked me if I would serve on one of his committees and I said sure, I'd do it. Then Walt had a personal crisis, his mother was dying of cancer and he couldn't chair the committee, so he asked me if I would chair the committee and I said sure, I'd do that. It was called the, I think it was the PR&R, Professional Rights and

Responsibilities Committee. And that was basically it was our first year of bargaining and we were drafting a grievance procedure for the bargaining contract.

This was like 1964 and '65; in the 64-65 school year so that's how I got initially involved and it interested me. I had a course in labor law at Detroit College of Law where I was going to law school at night, I was primarily a night school lawyer, and one of my teachers was a very well-known labor relations specialist in the Detroit area by the name of George Roumell. And George was a great teacher, a very good motivator, and so I was interested in labor law, and implementing the new collective bargaining bill law in the state of Michigan was really interesting so that's how I got started. And then I became the chairman of the grievance committee under the first contract in Birmingham and handled all the grievances by the teachers, which was a good learning experience.

Then Walt Rogowski was sort of slated to become the next president. Don was hired as the executive secretary for Birmingham Teachers Education Association, so Walt was going to step up and run for president and he had an opportunity to take a job in England over the summer and he said, "I can't run for president. There's too much to do. Why don't you run for president?" And I said, "Okay, I'll run for president." In May of 1967 I ran for president of the BEA and was elected. There were about 1100 teachers, and I had the support quite candidly of Cameron, and there was a coterie of political insiders in the BEA and I had their support. I mean, I was not the most scintillating candidate ever. I was a very nervous speaker so I didn't come across well in a group.

But everybody had confidence in me in the sense that he knows what he's doing, he's knowledgeable and so I was elected, and lo and behold, we went on strike that summer. Cameron tells about the strike built up in his book *Inside the Teachers Revolution*, and we went on strike for about fifteen days. I had taken the bar exam, and we went on strike and we were enjoined, it was against the law to strike in the state of Michigan, and I had some trepidation that maybe my admittance to the Bar Association would be jeopardized by being thrown in jail for leading the strike. But after fifteen days we convinced the teachers that we weren't going to gain anything with more strike days so why don't we go back and work for a contract? So we went back.

Now, Don Cameron is the executive secretary and I'm working closely with him, I'm the president, and he's the chief bargainer; I'm not the chief bargainer, he's the chief bargainer. So we get an agreement, it's sometime in December, we've been working well on the contract. The teachers are in turmoil, a lot of bitterness. We get a contract, Cameron seals it and we bring it in front of the teachers and they turn it down, big time. So I'm faced with a choice and so I say to Don, and he agreed with it, that I was going to select another chief bargainer, and my political instincts told me to pick the loudest mouth in the group that turned it down. So I picked this guy, and he always stood up in meetings, he was very loquacious, he presented a good fiery image. He clocked tough but he didn't get anything more than Cameron got.

He got a little more but, so we go back, he seals another deal and so we go back to the membership and they're going to turn it down again. And I must say this was the greatest

moment of Don Cameron. He had the moral courage. I mean, we're all stunned. It was clearly the voters going against us. You could sense it in the room. We have, you know, 800, 900 teachers in the room, and we're all sitting up there and our mouths are agape. Cameron stands up, goes to the podium and says, "All right people, how many bargaining teams are you going to go through? You've already gone through two. What is it, three or four, how about five or six? Get with it people. There isn't any more. It's over. And the mood of that group changed just by that confrontation and it was voted out. It was like 700 to maybe 200 or 300.

But inevitably, when we asked people for their reaction they would write out their reaction, you fucked us again Dunlop, that sort of thing. And I think within any political group you have militants, what you call barn burners that tend to be more aggressive and more demanding and are less flexible, and there was certainly a coterie of that in our group. I represented a middle strand, as did Don and Art Delvero, The guy that had replaced Don as the chief bargainer was a militant but he was a thoughtful militant in many ways. He understood what we were doing. So we all go back to work, but there is within the BEA a coterie of a group that I would call the firebrands, the leftists of our organization. They were angry at Cameron for doing what he did, of stopping this great ship from running aground, which they wanted it to do apparently.

So my term ran out at the end of 1968, and Cameron and I are sitting in the office, and I did not know much about either the Michigan Education Association, although I interacted with them more and more and I knew their staff people and their way of

operating, I attended the meetings that they had with the locals, but my contact with the NEA was very minimal. In January, I think it was January 1968, there was a statewide strike in Florida and the NEA sent out a call to staff people asking them to come to Florida to help organize this strike, and Cameron said to me, can I take a couple of weeks leave to go to Florida? I said yeah, if you take me along. So he said yes, so he and I flew down to Florida and he worked in one area, I worked in another area in the Florida strike, which was not very successful. It was a statewide strike and they were confronting the governor.

**VS:** Yeah, '68, and that was the first time the NEA had endorsed a statewide strike, I think.

**JD:** But NEA responded to it quite well, so I then started to understand even more about the NEA, and interestingly enough the NEA staffer that was sort of coordinating all these people coming in was a fellow by the name of Larry Sorenson who I got to know quite well later on and when I worked with the NEA. But it was kind of interesting to see a lot of the people that I got to know later on, you know, there in Florida. And at about that time, Cameron got across his desk a flyer saying they had job openings in the NEA, one of which was a job opening they called negotiation specialist. He said, "Why don't you apply for that, John?" And I said, "Sure." And he said, "I'll recommend you." "Yeah, okay, well good." And because I was a president of an organization that had gone on strike and I had passed my Bar exam, had been admitted to the Michigan Bar, and so I had all the credentials.

And so I was hired and I started work in September of 1968 with the NEA. I had applied for other lawyer jobs but this one was the most intriguing. And the interesting thing is that I think if I had stayed in Birmingham and been a teacher of that '68-'69 school year I would have earned \$8,500. NEA paid me \$14,000. Yeah, financially it was a great move.

**VS:** Going back to your time at BEA and your involvement with that strike, was this the first time – I know that for NEA, the sixties was the time when collective bargaining and teacher striking starts to become an issue, so I think in New York City in like 1960 they sort of tentatively supported the strike. So, BEA was an affiliate of NEA, not of AFT?

**JD:** No.

**VS:** Was this the first time that BEA had ever gone on strike?

**JD:** Absolutely.

**VS:** So everyone with the Association was sort of feeling their way around this event, I guess?

**JD:** A backgrounder on that that's really critical is that the Public Employee Collective Bargaining Law in Michigan was passed in 1964. It was signed by George Romney, governor, and the Michigan Education Association fought it, didn't want it because it was

basically a project that had been under the aegis of the United Auto Workers and Walter Reuther, and had been pushed by AFT units particularly of Dearborn, Michigan and Detroit to get a bargaining law, a collective bargaining law. And so it was passed, and to its everlasting credit, now you have an organization in Michigan. Edel Kennedy was the executive director, and he was an old lion school administrator, he was grey-haired, but he basically said we're going to make this law work for us.

He hired two attorneys. One was Irwin Elman who was a Detroit labor lawyer, brilliant guy, and one was Ted Swift who was in western Michigan, Kalamazoo I think, and they sort of oversaw the implementation, the MEA's implementation. So the MEA organized every local in the state and they said you have a responsibility to seek recognition and get recognition. We're not going to concede this to the AFT, we're not going to concede it, we're not going to drop out, we're going to fight this and one of the slogans I remember was, "We're going to out-union the union." And so we were very aggressive, the MEA was in promoting it. And by then Don Cameron had been deeply enmeshed, and so when we went on strike, the first Michigan Education Association staffer, that was a fellow by the name of Maury Andrews, and he sort of shepherded us through the strike and everything. He was a great, great resource.

And so, I don't know. The Michigan Education Association had taken a very narrow legal position that what we were – the law, bargaining law in Michigan clearly said you can't strike, but the lawyers had concocted a theory that they were withholding their services, not striking. We just won't sign our contract for the next one because you had

these annual contracts that you'd sign. We won't sign the contracts and we'll withhold our services until you the school board bend to our will. And the problem with that for us is that it worked in a lot of districts, but not only was the law preventing us from striking illegally, but we had signed a year before under Cameron as president and Walt Rogowski as vice president, a three-year contract that had a no-strike clause in it.

So not only are we striking against the law, but we're striking against our contractual commitment. And when we had a meeting of the membership the day before school was to start in a school in the Birmingham area, and I took the position that we could not strike, I recommend that you don't strike. Now, people thought it was a clever device on my part. It wasn't really. I didn't think a strike would work mainly because you tend to exhaust yourself over a period of time, and people begin to fight each other over a period of time. But our executive board voted to support a strike and so I said my mantra was whatever we do we do together, so once the strike was on I certainly was fully in support of it. It's the implementation of law, and there were a lot of strikes in Michigan that year.

And the injunction is against us for just generally – it's interesting, the judge that was an Oakland County judge who issued the injunction against the Birmingham Education, John Dunlop and Don Cameron, we were named, and his name was William Beer, and he said I don't care what the law says, I don't care what your agreement is, you've got a sacred commitment to the children and the students of Birmingham and that's why I'm issuing this injunction. He read us the truth sermon. It was about twenty years later, I kept track of what was going on, and Cameron's the executive secretary of the NEA, and



I'd come across this item in the *Detroit Free Press*. I called him up and I said did you read about Judge Beer? He said, "No, what?" "He's got two wives." He had a house in Oakland County apparently with a family, and he had a house with a family south of Detroit and he would commute back and forth between them. And Cameron and I just hooted and hollered. Here was the guy that had read us the religious tome about why we were so wrong.

And interestingly enough, because I'm member of the Michigan Bar I have access to their online forum, and it was about a year ago I'm reading and the lawyers are talking about William Beer and what he was like to be in front of. Then I thought boy, that's the guy that I remember. It was certainly we were fighting the AFT but our motivation was – I mean, we didn't have any AFT rival in Birmingham, it didn't exist. I mean, the AFT existed basically in Detroit and Dearborn, and there may have been other little places like Benton Harbor or something but they were basically in the cities, and Michigan being a suburban rural state in many ways, it was all the Association, so there was no significant rivalry. We just blew the AFT off the map, we meaning the MEA and all the local affiliates. It just, it didn't happen. The rivalry wasn't there. It wasn't as poignant as you saw, say, New York or even Florida.

The MEA really was the catalyst for it, and Edell Kennedy was really – I mean here was a man that got outside his experience and recognized it was a new day and said okay, we're going to do this. And he organized, led the organization of the MEA in a way that – and if you look at one of the things that you can tell about the NEA itself, the National

Education Association, is that if you look at staff people at given moments you can tell with a little search where did they come from in militant action. And there were coteries, and one of the first groups that came in before I came in was Ken Malley's group out of Connecticut. There was Ralph Flynn, Ken Malley, Ray Edwards, Vinny Carrman, a guy by the name of Jim Gaffney who worked in New York but was sadly killed in an automobile accident. And they came out of Connecticut and they had the initial bargaining experience before we ever had it in Michigan.

Then Michigan came, and then a whole slew of us went with the NEA. When I was hired in September of 1968 I was assigned to the regional office in Chicago. It was the Midwest Regional Office. The director of the regional office was Jean Preston. He had been the executive secretary of the Saginaw Education Association two years before. Also in the office, newly hired, was Mora Andrews who had been on the MEA field staff, and then there was me, a former local leader, and so there was this leaking out of experience. And Malley put together what was known as the organizing team that went around fighting the AFT, and one of the guys he hired was a fellow by the name of Chip Desoni. Then Chip was a PR man who I'd met in Michigan working as a consultant with the MEA, the Michigan Education Association during that period of the strike period.

We got the label the Michigan Mafia but it was because we had the experience, and to be honest, even though I was classified as a militant in many ways, in some ways I was a reluctant militant. But the Michigan experience taught me one thing about marketing is that you – and Cameron had it too – you kick them in the shins and they listen to you. So

my bargaining style for the next – I bargained for the NEA probably from ‘68 until about ‘74 before it started – I left direct field work and then became a headquarters person mainly. But you learn quickly that if you threaten to strike, number one you’d better be able to carry it out so we worked to organize strikes, but also if you carried it out you could use that as a significant leverage. And so wherever I went and wherever I bargained I tended to fall back on the strike as a weapon, and I would say that from a success standpoint it was probably fifty-fifty. Some of them were brutal.

Probably one of the last big bargaining ones I had was in the City of Baltimore in 1974, and Maryland had a law, it wasn’t a bargaining statute, it was called a negotiation statute which was, it had minimal oversight machinery in that it allowed you to talk to the other side but there wasn’t much beyond that. But they had a provision that if you went on strike you lost your representational rights, the organization did. I was sent into Baltimore to bargain, along with Dale Robinson, he and I were co-bargainers, which is another story. But anyway, we went in there and we’re bargaining with the school board. We were being hard and all this stuff, and they sort of sat back and laughed at us, “What, are you going to strike?” And I said, “Yeah.” “Well, you know you’ll lose your representational rights don’t you?” “Yeah, I know the law.” “Well you won’t strike.” I said, “You’re just giving us an option as to how we want to live, on our knees or upright. And I would rather, you know, die upright than live on my knees.” And they didn’t believe us and we took them out.

I can't say it was a successful strike. It wasn't a disaster either, and sure enough, we lost our representational rights. And that's the way the same happened in Hawaii. I was selected as chief bargainer in Hawaii in 1971, I think it was. It was a statewide, and Malley had been a key component in our beating the federation in their representational election. I had worked in Hawaii during the representational election and they got to know me and they said why can't John Dunlop be our bargainer? I said okay, well, I'll do that. So I was sent with my whole family to Hawaii for a year and I bargained on a statewide contract. I did the same pattern. We built our first strike, we went out on strike and it just lasted one day, and what happened was that when we threatened strike, the state government had not been, closely involved in what the school system was doing, but, as soon as we said strike the governor was right there.

It was John Burns, and he called me over the Governor's Mansion and said, "You really want to settle this?" And I said, "Any way I can Gov, Your Honor" or whatever the hell it was. And he said, "Well, I'm going to bring in a special guy and I want you to work with him." His name was Elmore Cravalho, he was mayor of Maui, and he was a political crony and he basically supplanted the school board and the chief bargainer that the school board had been using. So I tell this Elmore Cravalho and the chief bargainer that had been dealing with us, his name was Jack Reynolds – he was an old longshoreman bargainer, he didn't know anything about teacher bargaining, and he was overwhelmed by it and didn't do a very good job, but he wanted to keep his hand in it.

So at the midnight hour, literally, we're bargaining, you know, the strike is set for tomorrow. And I'm sitting in Governor Burns' office, and Elmore Cravalho and Jack Reynolds and I, and I think Al Hami is there. He was the executive director of the Hawaii State Teachers Association. We're all trying to get an agreement and we're getting close. And we're listening to the radio, Burns has it on in his office, and so I said well okay, I think we can buy this, I think we can buy that, is, I think we can buy that, what about you Jack? Jack says, "Yeah, I think we can do that." And literally, we're ready to ink it, and just on the radio our public relations guy Barry Able says the strike is on. Jack drops his pen and says, "I'm not going to sign this contract under the threat of a strike." He gets up and he walks away. I look at the governor, I said, "Can't you tell him to sign it Gov?" And he said, "Ah, that's Jack, that's Jack. Just wait a couple hours, he'll come back." So we cooled our heels for two hours, and sure enough, Jack Reynolds came back and signed the agreement.

I mean, we didn't have to have the strike, and I said to the governor, I said when we were sitting there and Reynolds is still fuming but he's going to sign it, I said, "You know, we've got another problem, Governor." He said, "What's that?" "Well, the teachers have lost a day of pay because of Jack Reynolds. We could have had school today." The governor said, "Yeah, you're right. I'll just call it a holiday." Then he looks at me and he said "Understand one thing, this isn't because of you, but I have to deal with my brother-in-law who is the head of all the ancillary personnel that runs the schools," like the janitors and the supervisors and the groundskeepers and all that, and he said, "I don't want to have any trouble with him." So that was it.

**VS:** Going back a little bit to your time at the BEA during that first strike, and how you mentioned how you had to explain to the members that it was illegal for them to strike and Don had to go before them and say hey guys, let's just take this deal because we're not going to keep negotiating forever, when you were with the NEA as a field representative going to the various associations who were on the verge of strike. So I guess two questions, at what point would you come and get involved? Were you there from the beginning when they were doing the bargaining, or did you come there—?

**JD:** It was usually a crisis. I became a crisis – although I was from the beginning in both Baltimore and Hawaii, those were big operations, but in smaller ones, like, I was in Bremen, Illinois and we took them out on strike too, but a lot of them. For example, one of the first jobs I had with the NEA is that I'm hired and Jean Preston says, "You're going to Rapid City, South Dakota." Okay. "They're on the verge of a strike." Okay. So I get on a plane, fly into Rapid City, meet the NEA field rep that's there, his name was Ed Roebrand, and he's got a lot of other things doing. He said, "You've got to take this over John. I've got to get out of here." So I'm thrown at the bargaining table. And in those states the state staff, who were unused to long drawn out bargaining, they tended to defer to us. That wasn't always true on every – because some states staffs, they didn't like us, they didn't want us around and thought we were trying to take over. But in South Dakota the state staff willingly said okay, you're the bargainer.

And what happened was that we're close to hammering an agreement, it was a three-member school board, one of whom happened to be an Episcopalian minister. He was a pain in the ass. We bargained all night one night. It was very common, you'd always bargain to a deadline because that bargaining to a deadline tends to focus people and make them much more pliable, both you and the other side. So we were close to an agreement and one of the school board members I guess had a heart problem, and he started having trouble and they said, "Well, let's come back tomorrow morning." And one of the things that you realized is that if you give people time to think about something, the deal that you're close to getting is probably gone, and I knew that. But I said, "You know." They said, "Oh, no, no, we'll come back and we'll just wrap it up." I said, "It's unlikely. We've either got to do it now—" "No, no, this guy is dying," or he could die or something. So sure enough, we come back the next day at noon, it's not there; it's gone. They had thought about it and they said no, we're not going to do it, so we had to shut that strike down. I mean, we just said to the teachers you got to go back to work and work without a contract.

And we did that in Baltimore, too, although we did ultimately give them an agreement after we had been enjoined, but again, the political dynamics both in Hawaii and in Baltimore is the key executive authority, or seeing the governmental entity like the governor of Hawaii and the mayor of Baltimore. They got involved. They would send their people to the table and said they're taking it over for this side. And so William Donald Schaefer, the mayor of Baltimore, took over the bargaining. I dealt with his people, but we got the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service involved and we got

the director of it, and Bill Ussery came in, in Baltimore, and he helped settle the agreement. And partly that was done through the offices of Bob Channer. Channer was our general counsel and he basically handled all the issues, the legal issues on collective bargaining.

And he tried to get the injunction stayed in Baltimore, and he was in the court there doing that. He was a very effective bargainer, too, because he would use the legal process to get agreements in a lot of cases. He would say to the other side, "Why don't we just go off to the side and settle this thing?" A very typical lawyer way of, you know, rather than litigate, and he did that frequently and was very good at it, too.

**VS:** You mentioned that Michigan, the AFT and the NEA, you know, the NEA sort of dominated Michigan as a state, but as you started going out into, you know, joined the NEA and you start going into different areas, there must have been times when you came up against an AFT, or maybe there was a certain district that was considering who they were going to go with. Did you get a sense that the NEA had to prove some credibility in this sort of new era, where they were embracing collective bargaining, that various affiliates, various educational associations kind of felt like the NEA needed to prove itself?

**JD:** To a degree, yeah. But the fact that by then, when I went out there I would get AFT people in audiences. Whether it was New Trier or Rockford, Illinois, or Portland, Oregon they were there. But the fact of the matter is, because I was an NEA staffer and I could



say listen I've been in twelve, thirteen strikes. Don't talk to me about militancy. I mean, if we have to strike we'll strike. We can be as tough as anybody. So, I remember one person saying, "Gee, I never heard an NEA guy talk like that." So I never felt that I had to demonstrate beyond a certain point what – I remember someone asking in the audience when we were – they said, "Where have you bargained?" And so, you know, I'd run off Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, and name the places and who the strikes were, and they'd say oh, okay, well that sounds okay.

One of the things that I learned so much through the ME, the Michigan Education Association, it was very well organized, from the very beginning they believed in something, although they didn't label that until a couple of years later, called coordinated bargaining. Basically when they went to the table in Michigan it was the same contractor pulls over every local. We did the same thing. It was a model agreement with model clauses, and also in Michigan they had set up a budget analysis process that you could do almost an instantaneous analysis to find out where the money was. So when I went into a little district like Summerville, Michigan, there are probably 200 or 300 teachers, it was in crisis. I walk in there and we're bargaining at the eleventh hour, it's Labor Day, school starts the next day, and I say to the president, I say, "Did you fill out the Michigan Handbook on your budget analysis?" He said, "Oh yeah, I got it right here."

So I could quickly look down and see what financial circumstances the school district was in, and you always looked for things like that. It would have rainy day funds or slush funds, and you would look at the past years and you'd see it grow. I mean, it was

200,000, a million dollars the next year, a million-two the next, and say well okay, that's where the money goes. And then you would play the innocent at the bargaining table and say, "I was just looking at this item; it's called contingency. Could you tell me what that's for?" And they'd say, "Well that's in case there's a tornado and a roof is blown off one of our schools." And it's, "Oh, have you had many of those over the last five years? Because I notice that it's grown from—" You know, and they're "Okay."

The interesting thing is, I mentioned Somerville, is that I walk in there and who was the mediator but my old labor law professor, Detroit College of Law, George Rummel. And I said, "George, you were my professor at DCL." He said, "Was I?" I said, "Yes, you probably don't remember." He said, "No." And so he pulls me off to the side and says, "Tell me exactly what you need." And I had looked at the budget and I said, look, and it was a miniscule, I saw like \$86,000, I said, "That's what we need." And he said, "Well do you think they have it?" I said, "Well, have a look at the books." And he said, "Okay, okay, I'll talk to them." He goes off. I don't see him for twelve hours. He comes back he said, "I got it, I got the eighty-six thousand."

So we seal the deal and everybody goes to work the next day. But George was well known and worked hard, really worked hard, and you could get at cross purposes with the mediators. Michigan had a whole stable full, and I remember I was bargaining in Lake Fenton, another small community in Michigan, and a mediator was sent in. And I had told the bargaining team, "You have to make the mediator work. I mean, you just can't, don't sit by and you do all the work. Let the mediator, that's why he's here, he's trying

to sell.” So I said that to the team, and we take a break and the mediator comes up to me. This was about an hour later and he says, “I hear you’re undercutting me.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “You told them that you had to make me work.”

And he pointed his finger at me, he said, “You know something? I’m going to make sure you don’t ever work in Michigan again.” And I smiled at him, I said, “I’ll go you one better. You won’t ever work in another Michigan Education Association mediation again, and I can fix that.” And I could simply by telling the MEA, make sure you strike this guy off the list any time he’s on. And he walked away, and we settled it. But those were the kinds of things that were part of the bargaining process. I enjoyed it a lot, but it took me away from home a lot. I was gone a lot and we just had a new family and so it proved some – I had to have some burdens. But NEA always, particularly for field staff people, you were on the go a lot in other places. But I was involved in the statewide strike in Kentucky in 1970, and that was another losing statewide strike but it was interesting.

And I got to know some people that later became colleagues. One was Vay Bolton. He was on the Kentucky staff and was later then hired by the NEA, another example of people going through experiences that NEA thinks are relevant for what they’re trying to do. Vay and I worked together in the Leadership Development Academy for many years.

**VS:** You mentioned a while back about how sometimes you’d go into an association that’s in the middle of bargaining or crisis or something and they wouldn’t want you to get

involved. So, I guess what was your role? Was your role whatever they wanted you to do kind of?

**JD:** Yes. Basically what you would try to do is, you're an organizer really, you're not, if they simply want advice then that's fine. If they wanted you to take it over that's fine. Sometimes you could slip in because they would turn to you and say well what do you think, and then that may give you an entry. So you played it by ear but there was never any rote methodology, but usually if it were a crisis they had already cried for help, we need help, we don't know what we're doing or we're at a point where – because there were a lot of technicalities. And in the first year of bargaining the thing that differentiated someone that had experience with someone that's just feeling their way forward is that you can anticipate what was happening, and you could lay out sort of like a decision tree. Say okay, if you do this, this is this, this, and people who had not had that experience had a more difficult time doing it.

But I was in the Midwest regional office for two years and then transferred to the Northwest regional office in Seattle for a year, and that was a different experience because they didn't have real hard bargaining in the northwest at the time. So I went around basically training people and training state staff people in bargaining, although we did have one bargaining brouhaha, and that was in Portland. Now, the thing about Portland, you're talking about what role you play. The Oregon law at the time said only local leaders of bargaining rep could be spokesmen at the bargaining table. So I could

not be a spokesman. As a matter of fact, they wouldn't even let me in the room, so I would wait outside and we would discuss and they would go back in and try to bargain it.

It was very frustrating but I didn't do what – we had a very good organizer by the name of Artie Erickson. He was a foreign naval pilot in World War II, flying off carriers, and Ernie had been in Portland. He said, "I've got an idea John, what we should do is that we get these radios and then they won't let us in the room but we'll have our leader say, well just a minute, I got to consult, and they'd go on the radio and say, well what do you think about this?" But Artie wanted to do that and I said no, I don't think so.

**VS:** Did you ever find yourself – you know, so you say you go in there and do whatever they want, did you ever find yourself as a sort of a voice of moderation or almost like opposing the association themselves?

**JD:** Yeah, you do that. I can't think of any specific instance. The closest one actually was a more militant, it was in a small rural town in Michigan and there was a crisis. What happened after I had left Birmingham and become in the Midwest Regional Office, the MEA, the next year there were so many potential strikes that they asked for NEA help. So we would go in there and we would be assigned given areas, then you'd fly around, literally drive around and then just pop in. And so I go to this one little rural community, and the teacher's bargaining team is really, really upset and they're split evenly between whether to go on strike or not go on strike. This was the criticism of the NEA: pop in, pop off and pop out.

So I'm sitting in the board room and I push them into being militant. They're split, and I said you know, what are you going to do, are you going to live like cowards? I didn't say that but, I mean it was whatever, you know, you got to take a stand. You can't be wishy-washy. And all of the militants would say, "Yeah, yeah. Yeah." And there were a couple of wafflers and I convinced them, and so they took a vote to strike. I'm out of there, right, and I'm reading in the paper about the strike in this little town and it's not going well. And I was like (indiscernible 50:53). I mean, there were so many anomalies that no situation was the same, and you just had go with what your instincts were and what your experience told you.

And one of the things I never did was I never painted a rosy picture about what a strike meant. In every instance I said, "You're going against the law and understand one thing, you can be fired. And it probably will stick if they really want to do it, and you can be fined, and if you ignore an injunction you could be put in jail. So don't give yourself the illusion this is going to be an easy thing." And I said, "They tend to last a long time, particularly if you're far apart, and it costs money, and you're going to go without pay, and you got to figure out how you're going to handle that." So we never, at least I never minced words if I were saying it to them. And they would shake their heads. And so they went into it knowing it was a tough fight. The MEA did a number of things that I thought were smart. One is that they did not, because they took this legal position that they were simply withholding services and not striking, you know, we never set up picket lines in Michigan, they weren't used at least in the time that I was there.

They may have; they were later on. With the tougher strikes we had picket lines but at this one we did not at the year. And it was primarily to give the illusion, and I can tell you that when we on strike the Michigan attorneys, Erwin Elman was not happy with our striking with a no strike clause in our contract. He is setting up an argument for the Michigan Supreme Court, and it was called the Holland Case and it came up just about a year, that same year that we went on strike. And he was afraid that our striking would queer the case for the Michigan Education Association. You're just using the subject use, but actually in the Holland Case the Michigan Supreme Court ruled on classic equity lines that if you seek an injunction, the school board, you have to demonstrate that you didn't do anything to provoke the behaviors, that you bargained in good faith, that you made every attempt, and so that sort of gave us an in for striking in Michigan.

And if you look at the data, strikes continued to rise in the country up until about 1981 and then they just dropped precipitously. I think 1981 was the greatest number of strikes, 187 in the year. Now, a lot of that had to do with the strikes were always when there were inflation periods. And from '71 to '81 there was very high inflation in the United States, so it was a constant battle to get a decent wage. The irony of that is that inflation was running like 10, 12 percent and we were getting settlements that were like 8 percent, 8.5, 9 percent, below inflation but looked good. So when inflation died after Volker came in in the 1980s we were getting settlements like 2 percent and 3 percent, but inflation was only 2.5 percent and our teachers were complaining. They said we're not

getting the settlements we – well, yeah, but your actual earnings are better. But they didn't see it.

**VS:** Did you notice, I mean you mentioned 1981, obviously Reagan comes in, he has that famous standoff with, what was it, the air traffic controllers? If from the time that you see cut to bargaining and strikes becoming a tool the NEA uses and it increases throughout the seventies, did you see a corresponding partisanship coming with that. I mean was it becoming, you know, was the NEA being seen more and more as a leftist organization? I know that by the eighties you start to see attacks from right wing organizations against the NEA.

**JD:** Well, I think that the NEA, in all candor, wanted it both ways. They wanted to be seen in one sphere as a militant organization, but also in another as a professional organization that promoted the good. And it's still an ongoing conflict of goals. We protect public education in many ways, that's what was one of the original, well, it was education generally but it morphed into public education, and then we become a spokes element for a specific group of employees within that. And I think that one of the great moments in NEA history that really gave rise to this partisanship that you're talking about was the 1976 presidential campaign where NEA leaped with both feet into the political arena. Up to that point, generally, NEA had a lobbying group and that but it didn't have a PAC, it didn't active. One of the things that intrigued everybody is that NEA had members in every congressional district in the country, so why can't we mobilize these in some way



that will affect outcomes? And as we're feeling our oats in the collective bargaining field, we're also saying well, let's marshal the troops for political action.

Well as soon as that happened then you invited – up to that point we were seen, I mean if you wanted to see, you know, the union was the AFT, the NEA was the professional association, and as soon as we leaped into the political arena and getting Carter at least nominated for president and to a large extent having him elected, then we're inviting a political retribution particularly among the Republicans. And they saw us simply as a wing, this is my assessment, of the Democratic Party and to a certain extent that was true, I think.

**VS:** You mentioned that strikes started dropping off in '81, and you mentioned inflation dropping off, but did you also find that you were facing more resistance with Reagan coming in, with the new conservative movement coming in?

**JD:** To a certain degree, but I think the dynamics are much more complicated. What you're also beginning to see is drop off in private-sector union saturation. If you look at the percentage of the private sector that's organized, I think a high point was like 34, 35 percent. This is just the private sector, and then it begins to start to decline. Well once that decline comes, what you have to understand it seems to me, this is the history guy coming out, is that our collective bargaining model was from the National Labor Relations Act. We tried to enact state laws that mirrored the NLRA. The Michigan Public Employees Relations Act mirrored the NLRA. And the NLRA was a conflict

management process, and the reason that enjoyed the policy support, both Republicans and Democrats, is in fact controlled conflict.

But when the saturation of unions started to climb in the private sector there wasn't that much conflict so why do you need it. And so it sort of lost its reason for being in the sense that we need it to control this conflict that can have economic consequences. And you probably didn't see an economically consequential strike after 1970, you know, not like the steel strike or the coal miners' strike or something like that that really could affect, and you could see the drop off in the United Steel Workers. They had what, a million, a million and a half members that were all steel workers? Well, they have what, 500,000 today and most of them are not steel workers.

So there was this decline in the private sector of unionization, and the sense among policy makers, many of whom were moderate Republicans who believed in collective bargaining as a valid tool. I mean George Romney signed the Public Employees Relations Act in Michigan. There's an old head of an automobile company, American Motors, and headed over to UAW and said, "I know how to do it, it's not bad for business, it can happen, and it's manageable." And of course the NLRA, and we inherited many of the precepts of it, was in fact a compromise. There were only certain areas that unions could bargain over, hours, wages, and working conditions. How the plant was run, management issues; that was off the table, you couldn't push those. And we ran into that in collective bargaining. Like, class size would be a, you know, it was a working condition truly, but it was also an education policy issue too. So we had

litigation in certain states around that. The issue, was it a mandatory bargaining issue, or was a permissive, and if it were a permissive the school board could say we're not going to do it. And we can't compel you, on the other side of the table, to do it.

**VS:** So you mentioned the NRLA I guess having less teeth as private unions start to shrink in number. Was there kind of an evolution of the laws allowing public sector unions to bargain, to strike, whatever? I mean, striking often seems like it was illegal, but in some states public sector unions aren't allowed to bargain. Did you see an evolution of laws, or was there an evolution of laws restricting it as time passed, how did that flow?

**JD:** Well there were, yeah, there were reactions that started limiting what could be bargained, Michigan being a good example. The recent example in Wisconsin curtailed bargaining. But that's this century. But if you want to track the evolution of let's say NLRA mirroring bargaining laws, what you have is from 1963, the Taylor Act in New York, up until probably the New California Act in 1974-75, that was the period of time that you had laws that mirrored the National Labor Relations Acts. And then you have some old irons like Tennessee and New Mexico coming in but they didn't have the machinery that, say Michigan had. Michigan law had a perm board, it was the Public Employees Relations Board, as did Hawaii and Pennsylvania, and by the way, one of the things we were also looking for in that period from '63 to '74 were getting the right to strike.

And you had a right. We had a right to strike in Hawaii, and you had a right to strike in Pennsylvania too, so we were looking to push laws in that direction but that all died.

That all died by the middle seventies. And one of the critical moments for the NEA and organizing is that in affiliate services, basically two elements of affiliate services, and this is 1976-77, there were two major units, one was organizing, the other one was bargaining. I had about twenty-some bargaining specialists spread out all over the country and Ray Edwards, the organizing specialist, had organizing specialists.

The director of communications at the time was Susan Lowell-Butler. She and Ray and I sat down and said lets pool our resources and focus on organizing for getting collective bargaining laws in southern states. And we called it, it was an ad hoc, we called it the Southern Organizing Committee, SOC, and we started looking at plans of how we could take these forty-odd-some organizers, bargainers, and put them in key spots all through southern states. It horrified groups within the NEA, because to send organizers, the problem is that you would wind up, they feared, splitting those state associations. First of all the state associations had gone through much difficulty making them fully integrated with the African American blacks and the white associations. That was a very tough fight.

Also going through that same period was unified dues. When I first came into teaching I had the choice. I could belong to the Birmingham Education Association, \$2 dues; I could belong to the Michigan Education, \$5; or the NEA, and/or the NEA at \$10. I could belong to one or all three. And so we went through a process of unifying, which meant if you pay your dues to one entity and you belonged to the state, local, and national, and that took changing state governance documents, and those were tough fights. So you had

the unified dues, you had the merging of the dual associations in the South, and then you put on top of that collective bargaining. It would have been a very – and so basically, at that time it was Terry Herndon was the executive secretary and Gary Watts the head, did not actively promote that idea. And one of the key regional directors at the time was a fellow by the name of Jimmy Williams, good guy, good man, but he sort of said you can't do that, it'll just destroy us. And I can't have you going into Georgia. I already have trouble in Georgia, I have trouble in Alabama. Or, I don't have trouble in Alabama but if you go in there I will have trouble in Alabama.

So that was the end of NEA's drive for collective bargaining nationwide. It clearly signaled the end, and so what we wound up doing is servicing and promoting bargaining to the extent we could, fostering it where it was like in North Carolina. But it wasn't going anywhere because you need organizers in there that would – to a certain extent Keith Geiger, when he became president, tried to revive that but it was very frustrating. We couldn't really do it because the states weren't on board.

When I first went into the NEA regional office in 1968 in Illinois, Illinois was not out for embracing collective bargaining. But Maury Andrews, Jean Preston and I decided we were going to promote it. Then, in true organizing fashion we'd go out into the locals and talk to the leaders, identify the leaders that were militant and we would then get them involved. Train them up and get them to put a contract in front of the school board and demand bargaining rights.

**VS:** As a field representative, did you ever go into any of those integrating associations?

**JD:** No, I never did, I did not.

**VS:** You didn't play any role in that part?

**JD:** No. I did in unification, the unified dues, mainly in, you would have to go in and tell everybody in a local organization how good unified dues would be. And I think it was Ken Melieu had said, we were sitting around one time, and I think it was Dale Astina, Ken was going to retire and so Dale said let's have a little breakfast with him at the Jefferson Hotel. I said okay, let's do that and just give him a send off, just the three of us. So we were sitting around and Dale asked a very perceptive question. He said, "Okay Ken, what's the most important thing the NEA ever did in your tenure here?" Without a moment's hesitation Ken said, "Unified dues."

Because if we had been left with having to recruit three separate entities we would have lost, the National would have lost. I mean, it struck a chord with me because I can remember, this is September 1960 in Birmingham, a little old lady in tennis shoes comes in and says, "Would you be a member of the association?" I said what is it? "Two dollars BEA; five dollars Michigan; ten dollars NEA." "I'll belong to BEA." And so Ken was absolutely right, and on top of that, in order to get the unified concept really motivated was the UniServ program too, which came in in 1970. And that was a contractual arrangement whereby NEA would contribute to local staffing and we would

train the local leaders and pay a part of the, it was usually one third but it certainly went beyond that over time. But those were things that drew the organization together in a cohesion standpoint, and they were very, very important.

**VS:** One of your roles then would be going in to, say, Alabama and convincing the teachers in Alabama that they wanted to do this, to vote for the unification.

**JD:** It was easier in Massachusetts. I worked in two, Massachusetts and Texas. And in Texas we ran into this you're a union, why do we have to become a union, they're going to run us. Oh no, we're not. Let's see, you're going to still run your own organization, or I could tell you what to do. Oh yes you are, you're a union. No we're not, that's not the way it works. And so you can look at certain states, like internal tensions, Texas is a good example, Missouri is another, Louisiana, and to a certain extent Georgia. Those were all fragmented, Mississippi too, at least during my period of time. They either broke away, fragmented on terms of the degree of militancy versus professionalism, that was Missouri and Texas, or around racial matters, Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia. And this is my perception, people might disagree with it, but the southern states that integrated well were the ones that had a combined credible black and white leadership. Alabama is the classic example. Paul Hubbard was the executive director of Alabama and his immediate assistant was Joe Reed, African American, who had, both of them had political clout in Alabama.

So both were credible, and the Alabama Education Association was a good solid cohesive, and that was true in Tennessee. But that wasn't true in Georgia and Louisiana and Mississippi because in some of those this is what I recall, I recall that in Mississippi most of the whites left and formed a professional association of the affiliate that the NEA had, which became basically dominated by African Americans and was weaker because of the fact that it was fragmented. But that was more a product of racism in the state than I think it was a professional. But in Texas and in Missouri I saw it more as a professional union split. In New York the split was AFT/NEA, but those are internal dynamics that made the NEA either more cohesive or less cohesive depending on where you were and what it was that you were involved in doing.

States like Kentucky they never had a bargaining law. Mississippi never got one, Arkansas never got one. States like Oklahoma and Maryland had relatively weak laws. They didn't mirror the National Labor Relations Act. They didn't have an administrative structure. The thing about the NLRA and the NLRB is that you had an oversight board that enforced the mandates of law, you had to bargain in good faith or you could file an unfair labor practice in Michigan. They had to bargain on an honest wage and working conditions, and they had a mediation and conciliation service that would attempt to resolve intractable bargaining disputes. And those were the good laws. California finally got one, and Hawaii and Pennsylvania and Michigan, and Massachusetts, New Jersey, those were really solid strong collective bargaining laws.



**VS:** So my understanding, if I'm remembering from looking through the collection in our history of the association, is that Missouri is the only state that got disaffiliated because they wouldn't unify. They just refused to unify. And so you mentioned having some of the same difficulty in Missouri as in Texas, and you worked in Texas. Do you remember what went right in Texas, how come it didn't result in disaffiliation in Texas?

**JD:** Whatever happened, I didn't work that much in Texas, but whatever happened is that it would always depend upon the credibility of local leaders. You had to make sure that these local leaders were very credible. If they weren't you were in trouble. It wasn't just us. You had to have someone that was a spokesperson that they knew. And I had it made, it was involved in a rep election, representation election with the AFT in of all places Fargo, North Dakota. And so they sent three organizers and I was one of them, and we divided up the buildings. And so there was this president, a little old lady of the association and she said, "Well I'm going to this school." It was a high school "And I'm going to make a pitch of why they should vote for the local association." I said, "Okay I'll come along with you." And she said, "Well, would you introduce me?" And I said, "Sure, sure I'll do that."

And so there were probably fifty teachers in the room, and I introduced myself and I gave a pitch for the NEA and the North Dakota Education Association, all the associations here and we're ready to support, and they listened attentively. And I was probably fifteen minutes of punch up and I said, "Now I'd like to introduce your president." They all got up and left. I'm not kidding you. Well, not all of them but a good number of them did

and when I walked out of that meeting I said to the other two organizers, I said, “We’re going to lose this. They have no credibility.” And no matter what, you know, you can sit there and tell everybody how good you were but they weren’t looking at you, they were looking at what they knew.

**VS:** As time passed, what was the relationship like with AFT? I know at one point I think in 1998 there was talk of actually merging the two associations?

**JD:** That was the year I wasn’t around. I had retired by January 1998. But we were moving closer and closer to working with the – I worked on healthcare reform when the Clintons came in in 1994, and I worked very closely with the AFT people, and it was expected. And as a matter of fact, I went with Keith Geiger to the AFT, AF of L; that’s the only time I got a chuckle in anything I ever said in a larger group. Going around the room about how we were approaching education reform and I was supposed to introduce Keith and I said well, you know, like, “Unlike the AF of L, we’re not of one mind on healthcare reform.” And the group just broke up in laughter because of course health care reform is the most contentious.

I mean, Trump saying who know that it was so complicated. The man is out to lunch on that story. One, he doesn’t know history. I mean healthcare reform, I’d go up to Maine and they would say, “Why are you supporting this?” Or Michigan, “Because people in Tennessee need it, is that why? Well we got what we want here, why are you doing this?” And so we worked closely with the AFT more and more as time went on and

through various venues. And part of that was Tom Cameron was what I would call a classic schmoozer. He liked to work with people and he didn't get hung up on ideology, which was both his strength and his weakness too, because he had to manage a conflict within it internally in the organization. People would say why are you talking to that person? But it was moving more and more toward accommodation.

Plus Cameron, you can read it in his book, he admired how the AFT could say things; how Al Shanker could say things that if our leaders said we'd be burned at the stake. But that was in part because nobody in the AFT questioned where Al Shanker's real heart was. Now, if Al Shanker came out and I supported merit pay, the AFT members would look at each other and say, "That's old Al, isn't he clever, because we know where he really is." An NEA person could even think of doing that and Cameron loved that, and Cameron had a great description. He said that the difference between the NEA and the AFT is the difference between a battleship and a PT boat. You know, it takes us seven miles to turn around and Al Shanker can turn his around in a heartbeat.

**VS:** Touching off of that, I know that there was a sort of longstanding conflict within the NEA of wanting to be seen as a professional association and at some point they sort of embraced becoming a union. But still, I imagine even today there's a little bit of a conflict between wanting to be seen as a professional association and wanting to be seen as a union. One of the things that I notice is that early on, you know, late sixties early seventies when you start talking about bargaining, the term is professional negotiations.

Is that just a marketing tool to name it that, or is there actually substantive difference between that and what later became—?

**JD:** There was a substantive difference and NEA wanted it. You're talking – let's say 1963 was when professional negotiations came out, the William Carr era, he was the executive. Warren Stirthic, the old NEA, saw itself is this huge professional organization, and one of the things they felt strongly about was that if we come under labor relation statutes and NLRA we'll become a labor union and we don't want that. We'll lose our umbrella. They were right in what happened, but it was inevitable because the professional negotiations concept said that we would not be under a labor board, number one. Number two, whatever constituted the unit could include both management and rank and file employees, which isn't allowed under the National Labor Relations Act. Managers are out of any bargaining because they can affect the outcomes of it, so there was a stark philosophical difference. There was only one problem, and this in part shows you the genius of some people within the NEA.

I think Alan West, he was assistant executive, did more to change the NEA than anybody else by what decision he made. They were facing a rivalry with AFT and collective bargaining and they did not know where to turn. And Alan West had gone to several types of meetings with, you know, like the American Manufacturers Association or whatever, and he had gone to American Bar Association, I mean I think. And he recalled meeting a lawyer from a law firm, Kaye Scholer, Fierman, Hays and Handler. It was a

labor firm, New York City, prestigious that handled collective bargaining primarily for management.

But he remembered talking to this guy, so when they're searching for support, how do we approach collective bargaining, he turns to Kay Shore and Kay Shore basically says we're a management firm but if you want to hire us we can certainly supply you. So they retained the Kay Shore firm and the guru, the bargaining guru that NEA used was a fellow by the name of Don Waller, and he basically shaped NEAs attitudes toward collective bargaining. And for anybody that was schooled in National Labor Relations Act looked at this PN concept and would say this isn't going to work, there are too many fudgies in it, too many fuzzy things, you can't define, you know, like, so it was like meet and confer, you know, that's not collective bargaining, it's not a mandatory subject.

And so that directed NEA toward – and then when they would hire people like me out of Michigan, and Don Cameron and Chuck Desoni and Maury Anders and Jean Preston out of Michigan that had the experience of a little NLRA, that's all we talked about. And although we still had a policy, I never talked about that. I would say oh, you know, professional, it's the same as collective bargaining, let's just not worry about that, you know, people. So that was crucial. And Harvey Zorbal was regional director and he tells the story, he told the story, he said, "You know, back in it must have been like '65 or '66 I was told to go see a guy by the name of Bob Chana, and he was a lawyer in the Kay Shore firm and he was working with New Jersey and with New York and Massachusetts, Connecticut."

And so he said, “I went to this law office in Manhattan and I went into this oak paneled room, carpeted, and I said where is Mr.Chana? Oh he’s, just go down that hallway.” He said, “I walked down that hallway and I walked off the carpet onto linoleum and in this little cubbyhole office was Bob Chana.” At that point he may have been a partner but I don’t think he was in Kay Shore, but he was, you know, an aspiring lawyer, a bright guy and very good at what he did, but NEA then retained him as an attorney, as a staff attorney in I think it was ’67 or ’68. Then from that they developed the General Counsel’s Office. But if you look at a 1968 handbook you’ll see a lot of lawyers sprinkled throughout NEA, like in the PR in our commission, we had commissions; they all died out.

I mean the structure of the NEA was I did not understand it. Well, they even had a crew called the Association of Classroom Teachers, ACT, and if you belonged to the NEA you belonged to the ACT. And it was supposed to be a powerful entity within the NEA, and then when collective bargaining came into existence and negotiations people began to question why do we have an ACT and it died out. It was finally killed in, I don’t know ’71, ’72, through the ’71-’72 constitution reforms. And Ann Margaret Stephenson, who was the head, the executive was powerful within the NEA. The locus of power within NEA in 1968 was certainly – the executive secretary at that time was Sam Lambert, he had been head of research and research was big a big powerful entity.

The NEA journal, Mildred Fenner was a big power center; the ACT under Margaret Stephenson was a power center in the NEA; and the legislative John Lumley, these were the ones that really directed the NEA. And it was Alan West who was the assistant executive, so Terry was sort of trying to scramble to make sure it survived in its fights with AFT and this emerging militancy on the part of the teachers, and that's the one that finally ate the NEA, that beast.

**VS:** It's interesting you made a comment now that made me think of something. So you mentioned that in '68 the legislative department was a sort of big power within NEA. And the way I've always read things is that the NEA was very hesitant until about the late sixties, I think 1969, to really have a very kind of vigorous stance on any legislation.

**JD:** Well that's true, it was more traditional lobbying. You know, back room, make your input. What becomes more and more to the fore is political action being tied to legislation and once you – and the NEA, that's what it was not robust in up until the middle seventies. And by the middle seventies, then it's going to go full bore into political action. Create a PAC, endorse candidates, we didn't do that prior to that point. But the legislative people could insinuate themselves on the Hill simply because they could carry the aura of this is someone who represents a professional organization. We know what we're talking about, we're really supportive of public education, and so when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed under Johnson, NEA had a role to play in it and it sort of basked in that. But it wasn't aggressive like it was later on, but the aggressiveness came out of political action rather than old line lobbying.

**VS:** Okay, I guess that makes sense, or it does make sense. Again, going back to something you mentioned earlier about working with healthcare reform, in 1994 at the Representative Assembly Hilary Clinton comes and she's the guest speaker. And I couldn't find the text of her talk, but I found a reference to the fact that she essentially made part of her talk, because at the time I mean her healthcare reform bill was still viable, I mean it may not have had much realistic life but there was still the possibility that it might pass, and she had asked the NEA to endorse her healthcare reform. Later on I went and looked at the resolutions that came out of that RA, and there's no resolution to support specific – I think there was a resolution that children should all receive universal healthcare.

**JD:** Actually I don't know. I have to go back and check, because I was involved in it, we did have a resolution that did not speak directly to education health reform, the Clinton health reform, but there was a resolution that spoke to supporting any effort that would lead to making it better for teachers generally. The notion was that we would support a single payer system. That's what we preferred, but that anything that moved us closer to that we would support it too. And I don't know if that was the '94 or the '95 RA but I can go back and look.

**VS:** That's interesting. I guess maybe it did happen a year later, maybe it was sort of too early to call.



**JD:** One of the things that you have to keep in mind is that we were deep into, we the NEA, was deep into the Democratic Party and he, Clinton, saw us as a significant player. And as a matter of fact, I don't know when it was but one of our chief lobbyists, Debra Delee, she became chairman of the Democratic National Committee in '98 or somewhere around there. I recall that we, in the midst of the healthcare reform, Hilary wanted to talk to Keith and to Debra and Keith asked me if I would join them because I was the technician. Although the back story was that, Keith didn't say this to me, but the back story was that they knew I wouldn't ask a lot of questions and dominate the interchange between Hilary and Debra and Keith. And they had that right because all I was there was to, if a technical issue came up. So we went to her offices in the West Wing and just the three of us chit chatted with – I didn't, not just yet, but she was very good. She could remember names very easily and so I said, "Well I have one question." And she said, "What is it John?" That's good.

But that reminds me of a story because one of the key Clinton people to push the political aspects of support for the reform, they hired Harold Ickes. Harold Ickes was the son of the old Secretary of the Interior under FDR. And this Ickes had great civil rights – he was really tightly wired is the best way I – so Millie is going to have a meeting with him and says, "Come on John, we're going to talk healthcare reform." So we go over to the Jefferson, a favorite watering hole by the way of Millie's, and Ickes is there and Ken says, "Okay Harold, we're going to talk healthcare reform." He said, "I've got my man here, he knows everything about healthcare reform." And Ickes just goes like this, he says, "I don't care about that shit. How many votes can you deliver?"

**VS:** Yeah, I guess that's politics, right. I have sort of one last thing I wanted to talk about. Feel free to continue on if you have anything else you wanted to mention. Again going back a bit, you had talked about how Don Cameron had always felt like Al Shanker could say whatever he wanted, you know, he could talk about for instance you brought up the issue of merit pay.

**JD:** Charter schools.

**VS:** Charter schools, but someone at the NEA couldn't because, you know, the NEA, you had to walk that sort of fine line. So my understanding is that that's what Bob Chase's New Unionism was, right, because it was like merit pay was one of the issues involved there. How did that play out? I mean, was it supported generally within the association, did you yourself have any—?

**JD:** Well, one of the problems is that, I think if I remember the timing right Chase was elected in '96 I think, and then he gave his Press Club speech in like February or March of 1997, so the new unionism is on from '97 and we're working to implement that. And I was put in charge of a committee that Chase had put together to write out what might be a plan of action for the new unionism. And we did that in September 1997, and that was one of the last things I ever did for the NEA and I was gone, and so I never was able to see what happened to it. This is my impression, and I would confess that this is just impressionistic. I think that what happened from '98 to say 2000 when Chase left, or

2001, whenever it was, that they got sidetracked with the political problems over merging with AFT and they sort of lost the impetus for whatever the new unionism made.

On my way out the issue that was in the forefront of New Unionism was peer evaluation and review, and it was getting a lot of internal flack particularly from people like Bob Chanin who said this, "If you turn teachers into evaluators you're taking them out of the bargaining unit." Now, as I understand it, and again I'm not privy to what really happened, but one of the locals that embraced peer evaluation review was Montgomery County, mainly through the efforts of their executive secretary and an NEA leader by the name of Mark Simon. And I gather it's been successful, well received, where teachers are involved in improving the instructional abilities of other teachers. But Maryland bargaining law was much different than say in New Jersey or in Michigan, where the definition of a unit would be those that are out of the unit are those that evaluate employees, or effectively recommend the same on the issues of retention.

So you're out of the union if you're a part of management, not a part of the workers. So that was a tension that I don't know how it was resolved. I think it just probably slid out of purview. Collective bargaining was in many ways a true movement. It captured the emotions of the time. People got swept up in it and said this is something that works, let's push it. Any issue within education reform never generated that sort of movement impetus. Out comes the *Nation at Risk* and there are fifty million schemes about how are you going to reform education, and the NEA is scrambling to say which one do we, and one of the ones that we focused in on was site-based decision making. Put more and

more decision making in the hands of building teachers, teachers in individual districts, but it's so fragmented and the outcomes are so variable and so hard to track that it never gave any impetus.

Cameron certainly believed and many people believed that the only viable way to make a reform would be this bottom up, with no impulse from the top. Just let it come up, rise up in the bottom. It was a good program, a very good program. Bob McClure oversaw it, was mastering and learning, you know, was sort of organizing at the building level around instructional issues. It was well done, but it was very intensive and took a lot of staff support and input. And what you'd have to is, you'd have to train up people somewhere, to go there; do it. The states were running around like chickens with their heads cut off in terms of meeting all the demands being made, so they couldn't put the resources. And then we had a thing called learning labs, Bob Barkley and others, another good, or tabs program, and they all were site-based decision making ventures, but you could never ever scale them up. You couldn't get them beyond a here and there and now because they were too complex.

Collective bargaining was something that could be easily sold, and in the end all propagandistic ways, if you have to spend some time explaining something you aren't going to catch. I mean it's like a researcher or an archivist working for the International Monetary Fund going through the records and snoring. I mean, there may be gems in there but you'd have to sort them out.

**VS:** Well, that's sort of what we do is we try to help people find the gems, which is why things like this I think are useful because it sort of, you know, highlights the things that people may be interested in. It's interesting. I mean I guess I hadn't seen it like that. I've always kind of seen collective bargaining as, you know, you've had this century where there had been no collective bargaining and there had been this constant, you know, you can see in the records, like 1930 statistics on how much teachers make versus other professionals, 1935 statistics on how much, like, you know, this sort of a constant attempt to be like look at the value, look at the value and sort of arguing against a brick wall. I mean, no change happens. And I guess I've always seen collective bargaining as just frustration, like we have not managed to get change after a century of doing things one way so we're going to try something another way. This is how we're going to get it to get what we need.

**JD:** Well there's another way to look at it, and that is from an evolutionary standpoint. I mean, I taught a course for NEA staffers on NEA as an employee union. I think three times I did that in early 2000. You would take evolutionary steps about how the NEA slowly perceived tenure. I mean most education reform ventures were done through say Columbia University, and then it would filter into the professional staff of the NEA and it would get translated into – so you've got tenure. Then you had teacher retirement and the development of the research, you know, let's get statistics out so we can compare. But it was all being driven by the superintendents in the top echelon of every school district. They wanted that. I think one of the ironies is that we get saddled with a single salary schedule as we're the ones that are why they're protecting it.

It was a creation of superintendents, that is what it was, because it was an easy way to determine how you – you know, you used to go in, say in 1910, and say what are you worth, I don't know. What's your experience, you know. And you would have someone being paid X dollars and somebody being paid five more, ten dollars less, or whatever, and from a management standpoint let me be able to predict what I'm going to pay every year so let's codify it and standardize it, and that was the impetus around the single salary schedule. And we wind up defending it, but it was not, it wasn't a union creation, and tenure wasn't a union creation either. It was how to isolate teachers from political hazards in their daily lives.

And so from an evolutionary standpoint NEA always had the seeds of being a good employee advocate union. Or probably better would be an employee advocate at the local and state levels, and it attempted to do it. And state associations were, I mean the state associations created the NEA, and they were very good lobbyists in doing things for teachers at state. And what people wanted was a greater sense of involvement and that's what collective bargaining gave them.

It gave them a sense that hey, I can influence what – Don Cameron tells a story, I don't know if he told in his book or not, I don't remember it. But associations would have salary committees, this was before collective bargaining law in Michigan, let's say since 1962-'63 when Don started teaching. And he was on the salary committee, and people took this really seriously and they would work up charts and they would have help from

the MEA and they'd work it out and they'd say okay, here. And they'd present it to the school board and the school board would sit there and say oh, that's very good. And they had data and reasons and argument and everything was all well documented. And the school board would say well, thank you very much but we've already settled the budget and this is all very interesting, believe me, and we appreciate the effort you did but here's what your salary schedule is. And that was so frustrating to all of us. That's what collective bargaining changed. They couldn't just hand it to us. They at least had to sit and listen to us, and in the words of the Supreme Court they had to act like their minds were not hermetically sealed from persuasion.

**VS:** I guess as a final thought, obviously we've seen since you left the NEA there's been a big change. You had what happened in Wisconsin. You've got right to work laws, you've got the possibility of, now that the new administration's in, really changing things. Do you have any sort of last thoughts on your legacy and what you've seen over the last twenty years?

**JD:** No. I see history unfolding, you know, I don't see that there's, I left any legacy in the NEA. It was a moment in time and we all seized, tried to seize the moment in time. I tell you it was a lot of fun most often than not. Fun in a good way, and we thought we were doing good for teachers. I always felt that, and I think everybody, Tim Mullen and Don Cameron and everybody thought that we were doing good for teachers and giving them a voice that they hadn't had in councils. What I can't fathom is the fragmentation of communication now with social media. How do you organize given the fact that are so

many outlets of information that every good organizer has to have a social connection with everybody that they're dealing with, to degrees that I never had to do. I was more monkish in the sense that I had expertise; people could buy into it or ignore. If they bought into it they appreciated it.

But I think, given the way that the general view of expertise, it's been depreciated greatly because everybody has access to so much information now that we didn't have. I mean I would have loved to sit in at a bargaining table and have an iPad. I could have answered every question they ever raised about merit pay at the press of my finger. But the dynamics are so much different, and the sense of cohesion which is elementary to any mass organization, that you have to be cohesive. Whether it's the US Army or the American Bar Association, they have to have a sense that this entity has a common interest, and it's important for everybody to be active in the promotion of that common interest. In part collective bargaining gave you a sense I can be active in our common interest around wages, hours and working conditions. And the way management of schools and administration of schools has been changed it is, you cannot on a mass scale, this is my sense right now, achieve the same degree of cohesion in large entities that we could have done thirty, forty, fifty years ago. It's just, it's like if you ask me how do you organize—

[End Dunlop1]

[Begin Dunlop2]



**JD:** In 2017, what would the answer have been if someone sitting in 1918 how to fight World War I asking a Civil War veteran, how do you fight a war? Well, the differences were monumental, circumstances. I mean, you'd go with the same principles, you know, surprise the enemy, okay, how do you do that. But I think there are still some things that are basic to good organizing that hold true. But I just don't see them able to be implemented on a wider, wider scale. Who was the guru, I forget his name but he wrote the biography of – Janet Lewis, and he made a distinction between an organizer and a business agent. A business agent simply services people, an organizer activates them.

If you went into a local association and someone was being fired, if you acted like a lawyer then you were being business agent, say okay, well I can give you legal advice and that. But if you then said, "Who are all your friends? Get them in this room and let's active them" then you were being an organizer. Make them mad, they shouldn't be treating like this, kick their shins; that what an organizer is. And to be able to do that in this day and age seems to me to be extremely difficult. Given the social fragmentation and communications they're just – and it's promoting a group identity, and that, I don't see how it's easily done today, I just don't.

**VS:** Okay.

[End of Interview]